



**WASHINGTON STATE PATROL – FIRE PROTECTION BUREAU  
INSPECTION SECTION**

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# 10 Most Common Nursing Home Violations

From Fire Code Inspections Conducted By  
The Washington State Fire Marshal's Office  
Data Compiled from January 1 through December 31, 2010

## 1. Doors

Doors protecting corridor openings in other than required enclosures of vertical openings, exits, or hazardous areas shall be substantial doors, such as those constructed of 1 ¾ inch solid-bonded core wood or capable of resisting fire for at least 20 minutes. Doors in sprinklered buildings are only required to resist the passage of smoke. There is no impediment to the closing of the doors. Doors shall be provided with a means suitable for keeping the door closed. Dutch doors meeting \*19.3.6.3.6 are permitted. \*19.3.6.3 Roller latches are prohibited by CMS regulations in all health care facilities. \* NFPA 101, 2000 edition

### Problem

- Doors that did not close and/or latch properly.
- Doors purposely blocked from closing with wedges and/or doorstops.
- Penetrations in the door compromising the smoke resistance of the door.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Maintain doors, on an ongoing basis, to operate properly.
- Remove wedges and doorstops from the area.
- Penetration shall be filled with a material that is capable of limiting the transfer of heat and smoke and shall meet or exceed the fire rating of the door, or an approved device that is designed for that specific purpose.

## 2. Fire Sprinkler System – Testing, Inspection and Maintenance

Required automatic sprinkler systems are continuously maintained in reliable operating condition and are inspected and tested periodically. NFPA 101, 2000 ed. 18.7.6, 19.7.6, 4.6.12, NFPA 13, NFPA 25, 9.7.5

Problem	How to Avoid or Address the Problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Missing escutcheon plates/escutcheon rings.</li><li>• Painted sprinkler heads.</li><li>• Obstructed sprinkler heads.</li><li>• Areas with no sprinkler protection.</li><li>• Overdue tests/inspections.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replace missing escutcheon plates and rings.</li><li>• Replace painted sprinkler heads.</li><li>• Remove the obstruction or contact a fire sprinkler contractor for recommendations.</li><li>• Contact a fire sprinkler contractor.</li><li>• Ensure inspection and testing of the fire sprinkler system is completed on time and a record is kept and made available upon inspection.</li></ul>

## 3. Electrical Wiring and Equipment

Electrical wiring and equipment shall be in accordance with NFPA70, National Electrical Code. 9.1.2

Problem	How to Avoid or Address the Problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Misuse of extension cords, i.e., using extension cords in place of permanent wiring.</li><li>• Daisy chains or piggy-backed power cords.</li><li>• Obstructed electrical panels.</li><li>• Mislabeled or un-labeled electrical circuit boxes.</li><li>• Outlets that were not Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter GFCI approved.</li><li>• Portable space heaters.</li><li>• Open junction boxes.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove extension cord, plug electrical appliances directly into wall outlet.</li><li>• Each power cord must go directly into the wall outlet.</li><li>• Remove items blocking electrical panel.</li><li>• Apply proper labeling to identify each individual breaker within electrical circuit boxes.</li><li>• Replace outlet with a GFCI approved outlet.</li><li>• Space heaters may only be used in non-sleeping staff and employee areas where the heating element of such devices do not exceed 212 ° F (100 ° C)</li><li>• All junction boxes shall be provided with covers in compliance with NFPA 70 (National Electrical Code).</li></ul>

## 4. Type of Construction

Building construction type and height meets one of the following From NFPA 101, 2000 ed. 18.1.6.2, 18, 18.1.6.3, 18.2.5.1 and 19.1.6.2, 19.1.6.3, 19.1.6.4, 19.3.5.1.

### Problem

- Construction does not meet the requirements of the 2000 Life Safety code or the standards adopted with the 2000 Life Safety Code. This is especially common if exceptions were made during the plan review process and the facility does not have the approved plans and documents at the facility.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- To avoid this problem maintain building plans and all records pertaining thereto, including any exemptions that were given during the plan review process. Contact Department of Health Construction Review.
- CMS requires that all participating facilities meet the standards that are in affect with the adoption of the 2000 Life safety Code and the state adopted codes and their standards.

## 5. Means of Egress

Means of Egress shall be continuously maintained free of all obstructions or impediments to full instant use in the case of fire or other emergency. No furnishings, decorations, or other objects shall obstruct exits, access thereto, egress there from, or visibility thereof shall be in accordance with NFPA 101, 2000 ed.7.1.10.

### Problem

- Obstruction violations involving equipment and carts, furniture and storage issues.
- Not exiting to an all-weather surface.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Remove all obstructions from means of egress.
- The slip-resistant surface of an exterior exit discharge walkway constructed to retain adequate firmness to prevent excessive resistance to the rolling capabilities of wheelchairs, beds and walkers in all foreseeable weather conditions.

## 6. Generators

Generators inspected weekly and exercised under load for 30 minutes per month and shall be in accordance with NFPA 99, 3.4.4.1, NFPA 110, 8.4.2 This potentially affected all residents to loss of illumination of exit egress, fire and smoke alarms during a power outage. Findings include failed to assure that emergency power was available during primary power outage in accordance with NFPA 99, 3-4.4.2 requiring documentation of testing, maintenance and repairs of the generator.

### Problem

- Failed to maintain a proper log showing that the generator had been placed under a load monthly.
- Failed to maintain records that the annual service was conducted on the generator
- Generator does not start within required time period.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Keep a record of the generator testing and maintenance.
- Keep a record of the generator testing and maintenance. Make sure the record is available to the inspector.
- Generator must be repaired and adjusted to consistently start within the correct time limitations.

## 7. Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers shall be provided in all health care occupancies in accordance with 9.7.4.1, NFPA 10. 18.3.5.6, 19.3.5.6

### Problem

- Failed to assure fire extinguishers are properly maintained. This potentially delays a quick response to contain a fire from spreading, exposing residents to fire in the environment.
- No documentation of the portable fire extinguishers being inspected monthly for the past 12 months.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Be sure fire extinguishers are refilled after each use and receive all maintenance and servicing as required by the standard.
- Ensure that monthly inspection of fire extinguishers has taken place and that a record has been kept and is available upon request.

## 8. Sprinkler System – Installation and Maintenance

If there is an automatic sprinkler system it shall be **installed** in accordance with NFPA 13, Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems, by an approved contractor to provide complete coverage for all portions of the building. If partial system, indicate location of sprinklers. The systems shall be **properly maintained** in accordance with NFPA 25; Standard for the Inspection, Testing, and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems. It shall be fully supervised. There shall be a reliable, adequate water supply for the system. Required sprinkler systems are equipped with water flow and tamper switches, which are electrically connected to the fire alarm system. From NFPA 101, 2000 ed. 19.3.5

### Problem

- Areas that had no or insufficient fire sprinkler protection.
- Obstructed sprinkler heads or sprinkler discharge pattern.
- Damaged or otherwise compromised sprinkler heads.

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Contact a fire sprinkler contractor.
- Remove any items that are obstructing a sprinkler head or its spray pattern.
- Replace any damaged or compromised sprinkler heads.

## 9. Smoke Barriers

Smoke barriers shall be constructed to provide at least a one-half hour fire resistance rating (one-hour for new construction) and constructed in accordance with 8.3. Smoke barriers shall be protected by fire-rated glazing or by wire glass panels and steel frames. A minimum of two separate compartments shall be provided on each floor. Dampers shall not be required in duct penetrations of smoke barriers in fully ducted heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems 19.3.7.3, 19.3.7.5, 19.1.6.4 NFPA Standard: NFPA 101, 8.3.6.1. Pipes, conduits, bus ducts, cables, wires, air ducts, pneumatic tubes and ducts, and similar building service equipment that pass through floors and smoke barriers shall be protected by filling the space between the penetrating item and the smoke barrier with a material that is capable of maintaining the smoke resistance of the smoke barrier or it shall be protected by an approved device that is designed for the specific purpose.

### Problem

- Failure to maintain the integrity of smoke barriers. This potentially allows the spread of smoke to other areas of the facility, exposing residents to a smoke or fire environment

### How to Avoid or Address the Problem

- Protect by sealing the penetration/opening with a fire rated material that is capable of maintaining the smoke resistance of the smoke barrier or restore any damaged or compromised smoke barriers to their original fire rated construction.

## 10. Fire Drills

Fire drills are held at unexpected times under varying conditions, at a minimum quarterly on each shift. The staff is familiar with procedures and is aware that drills are part of established routine. Responsibility for planning and conducting drills is assigned only to competent persons who are qualified to exercise leadership. Where drills are conducted between 9:00 PM and 6:00 AM a coded announcement may be used instead of audible alarms. NFPA 101, 2000 ed., 18.7.1.2, 19.7.1.2

### **Problem**

- Fire Drills not being held regularly.
- Not keeping a record of the fire drill.

### **How to Avoid or Address the Problem**

- Fire drills are to be held at unexpected times under varying conditions, at least quarterly on each shift, i.e. Day/Swing/Night-NOC.
- A record of all planned fire drills must be maintained and made available upon request.

The role of facility staff in reporting deficiencies through their chain of command, such as; an exit light out, a door not closing properly, or even being due for a fire drill cannot be over emphasized. Reporting deficiencies right away allows for quicker repairs and makes the building safer for staff, clients and guests.